San Antonio Express-News

Serving South Texas since 1865

Monday, October 19, 1998

Performance artist Sharon Bridgforth brings 'Bull-Jean Stories' to life

BY HECTOR SALDAÑA
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Arts in Review

Performance artist and author Sharon Bridgforth turned the relatively benign setting of a book reading at the Esperanza Center Friday evening into a powerful megaphone for her new book, "Bull-Jean Stories," a collection of non-linear short stories.

On the page, "Bull-Jean Stories," looks and reads like poetry. On the stage, Bridgforth, 40, effortlessly presented selected passages as she intended them — the lyrical conversations and innermost thoughts of her main character, Bull-Dog Jean, and those around her.

Friday's performance was dedicated to the late Marsha Gomez, an Austin artist recently murdered by her paranoid schizophrenic son.

"She was my mother in a past life," said a solemn Bridgforth, echoing her favorite theme: "Remembering those who have come before us."

Like Bridgforth, Bull-Dog Jean is black and a lesbian. Unlike Bridgforth, Bull-Dog Jean is older, well beyond middle age; wise, but not-too-educated. Bull-Dog Jean, as depicted by Bridgforth, is a throwback who speaks and thinks in the gentle, almost resigned, antiquated, voice of the Reconstruction-era Negro.

The effect is stunning. Certainly, the language and tone is colloquial. And while the dialogue can, at times, can be raw, it is by no means the perceived one-dimensional voice of the modern 'hood.

Bridgforth is an extraordinarily natural and relaxed actor. She encouraged her audience to not be intimidated by the stage and spotlights. "Let's make this our own kitchen," Bridgforth said.

To hear her tell it, Bridgforth is simply preserving the oral history of he elders. Perhaps, but what is immediately evident is the artist's deft touch with the nuance and pace of language. It is this skill that turns a potentially coarse diatribe into a romantic soliloquy.

Bull-Dog Jean is not Bridgforth's alter ego, the author claims, but onstage the line seems awfully thin. The author obviously has fun with the character, making her a sometimes jealous and protective lover. Humor is the underpinning and even Bull-Dog Jean's sexual droughts sound funny.

At one point Bull-Dog Jean interrupts a wedding ceremony by proclaiming her love: "You're my biscuits and gravy." The laughter from the small crowd of 40 or so friends and followers was often loud and heartfelt.

The sexual politics never went much beyond Bridgforth's hope for "a future laid down with love." Perhaps the most touching passage and poignant scene was one which found Bull-Dog Jean reunited with her long-lost son.

Bridgforth held a question and answer session after her performance.

One audience member asked about Bridgforth's transition from performance artist to author.

"I was ready for that. Theater life is very hard. It's a business that eats its own," said Bridgforth, who remains the artistic director of Austin's Root Wy'mn theater company. "To make a living is gruesome. It wore me down."

REDBONE PRESS
P. O. BOX 1805 Austin, TX 78767

Title: *the bull-jean stories*

Author: Sharon Bridgforth

Edition: First

Print run: 2,000

ISBN: 0-9656659-1-7

Pages: 111, 5 x 8.5

Price: $12.00

Season: Winter

Publ. date: October 1998

A copy of your review to the address above would be appreciated. For author interviews, contact Lisa C. Moore at (512) 498-4997.

spirited

AFFIRMING THE SOUL AND BLACK GAY/LESBIAN IDENTITY

edited by G. Winston James and Lisa C. Moore

REDBONE PRESS

Lisa C. Moore
Editor/Publisher

TEL [512]498.4997
P. O. BOX 1805 Austin, TX 78767

spirited!

AFFIRMING
THE SOUL AND BLACK
GAY/LESBIAN IDENTITY

Edited by G. Winston James and Lisa C. Moore

In *Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity*, more than 40 writers address the question of how we, as same-gender-loving black people, affirm ourselves as sexual and spiritual people. These sacred narratives are a canon for our survival—holy texts proclaiming the divinity of our lives, the righteousness of our love, and the sanctity of our being. *Spirited* is a must-read for those on a journey toward spiritual and self-acceptance.

Order through your local independent bookseller, or contact:

RedBone Press
phone/ 202-667-0392 fax/ 301-559-5239
redbonepress@yahoo.com

ISBN 0-9656659-3-3 $16.95
Cover art © 2004 by Janet Nicholson
Cover design by Eunice Corbin

REDBONE PRESS
P.O. Box 15571
Washington, DC 20003

Place
Stamp
Here